TESTIMONY BY REPRESENTATIVE DON PRIDEMORE
ALLOWING PRIVATE SCHOOLS OUTSIDE THE CITY OF MILWAUKEE TO
PARTICIPATE IN THE PARENTAL CHOICE PROGRAM - GRADES 9-12
ASSEMBLY BILL 637
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION REFORM
JANUARY 8, 2008

I would like to thank the members of the Assembly Committee on Education Reform for taking the time to hear Assembly Bill 637 today. This bill would be a small, but effective way of increasing graduation rates for Milwaukee high school students. It is also a more fair way of offering educational opportunities to Milwaukee students. Allow me to explain why.

Interestingly, effective schools participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) would like to enroll more low-income students, but high school capacity is becoming a problem. Messmer High School has a waiting list to get on the waiting list. This is a problem that could be remedied with the passage of Assembly Bill 637 which is a simple and revenue neutral fix. By passing this bill, MPCP students that desire to continue their attendance in a private high school upon completion of grade 8, would have the ability to do so. Whitefish Bay Dominican and St. Thomas More High schools are examples of schools that would be eligible to participate in the MPCP with the passage of AB 637.

Disappointingly, a high school diploma has been an accomplishment eluding many students in the city of Milwaukee. Graduation rates for Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) vary depending on how graduation numbers are manipulated. Some studies have MPS graduation rates at around 65 percent, but most are much lower, hovering as low as 36 percent. Credible studies have MPCP participating schools with graduation rates that are double what MPS schools are. These studies and articles discussing them are attached to my testimony. Whatever the number, one thing that we should be able to agree on is that it is in Wisconsin's best interests to have more high school students graduate in the city of Milwaukee. It is hard to argue that putting more students in successful schools would not be a positive step toward this. That is what AB 637 would do and why it is a positive bill for Milwaukee students.

Simply put, a MPCP pupil should not be hindered in his or her educational development because they have fewer options to attend high school. Assembly Bill 637 would update Wisconsin law to allow students that begin a private education with the MPCP the option to finish his or her private education with a graduation certificate from a MPCP school. The alternative is to force these pupils into schools they do not choose and that are less successful. There are excellent private schools ready and willing to accommodate students caught in this dilemma. If we give students and their families the ability to choose successful schools, I have confidence they will do so and will improve overall Milwaukee graduation rates in the process.

The passage of this bill will be a fair way of treating MPCP students compared to MPS students, because currently, MPS open enrollment students are able to attend schools outside the city of Milwaukee. So, it would seem only fair to allow MPCP students the same opportunity.

In order to emphasize the need to expand the number of participating MPCP high schools that accommodate participating pupils, listen to these numbers. The average 2007-08 MPCP enrollment in grades 4K-8 is

1,580 students per grade. That average drops to 858 pupils per grade for the same school year in grades 9-12. As you can see, there is a huge drop in MPCP students when they reach high school which is largely a result of the limited amount of private high schools to choose from. This is also the result of students working their way through the MPCP over time and because of this, the need for more high school space will become even more critical.

In summary, this is what Assembly Bill 637 would do differently than current law. Currently, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) allows eligible low-income pupils who reside in the city of Milwaukee the ability to attend participating private schools located in the city of Milwaukee at state expense. Assembly Bill 637 would allow private schools that are located outside the city of Milwaukee [but within Milwaukee County, and that enroll grades 9-12] the ability to participate in the MPCP for students in grades 9-12. The bill does not make nonresidents of the city of Milwaukee eligible to participate in the MPCP. Eligibility for the MPCP would stay the same under this bill. Again, only residents of the city of Milwaukee would continue to be eligible to participate in the MPCP with the passage of AB 637.

This bill does not require a state or local fiscal estimate because it does not increase the number of pupils eligible to participate in the MPCP. This bill is supported by School Choice Wisconsin. In my opinion, this bill should be passed because it is the right thing to do for the children currently enrolled in the MPCP. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions that committee members may have.

Enclosures



Messmer to Oversee 2 Catholic Schools; Plan for Elementaries Underscores Eventual High School Needs

By SARAH CARR

In an effort to keep Catholic education in the central city strong, Milwaukee Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan said Monday that Messmer Catholic Schools will take control of two core inner city programs, St. Leo and St. Rose elementary schools.

The move is partly an attempt to address flagging enrollments and inadequate funding at the two schools, which could have closed without a significant change, Dolan said.

The announcement paints a contrast to other cities across the country, where Catholic schools are closing in record numbers. It may also bring to a head the issue of a shortage of Catholic high school options for some inner city students, said Brother Bob Smith, president of Messmer Catholic Schools.

"This high school question is going to be a major one down the road, and not far down the road," he said. "We would be poor stewards if we got children into our system in elementary school and didn't have a place for them for high school."

The rapid growth of Milwaukee's Latino population is one of the main factors leading to the crunch at the Catholic high schools: While the number of Latinos in the city's Catholic K-8 schools has grown rapidly, the number of available high school slots in the choice program has not kept pace.

Messmer will take control of St. Leo, 2458 W. Locust St., in the "near future," and St. Rose, 514 N. 31st St., in time for the 2008- '09 school year. "We've asked (Messmer) to parent these two schools," said Dolan. "Up until now, the archdiocese has done this. I think Messmer can do it better."

Dolan said the archdiocese's resources are being pulled in many directions, and that asking Messmer to take the helm was important because "I do not want to surrender (Catholic) schools in that area." He said Messmer, which runs its own high school and K-8 program, has a proven track record in fund raising, improving facilities and building enrollment. Messmer runs its schools fairly independently of the archdiocese, and will run St. Leo and St. Rose (known as the "urban academies") the same way.

St. Leo has just over 150 students, with a capacity for about 250 in the current building, said its interim principal, Alvin Spearman.

Smith said one of the first priorities will be increasing the enrollment at St. Leo. He did not rule out moving the school to a new location in the same neighborhood, or that the name might be changed.

At the same time, a strategic planning group is meeting to discuss ways to expand the Catholic high school options in Milwaukee, particularly for those who cannot afford to pay the tuition on their own.

Over the last few years, Messmer has taken more Latino students from the south side. But options are limited for families who start their children in Catholic elementary schools through the school voucher program and want them to continue in the voucher program at Catholic high schools.

Dolan and Smith said Monday that Dominican, Thomas More, Pius XI and St. Joan Antida high schools have expressed interest in accommodating more low-income students. But Thomas More is not allowed by the state to participate in the voucher program because part of it is in St. Francis.

In the meantime, hundreds - if not thousands - of Latino families have joined the voucher program at south side Catholic elementary schools. And if St. Leo and St. Rose grow, it will add to the pressure on the high schools.

"We know in the very near future there will come a point when we have to figure something out, and it can't be little," Smith said. He said Messmer has thought about adding a second high school campus.

"We do not want to see any more Catholic schools close," Smith said.

Copyright 2007, Journal Sentinel Inc. All rights reserved. (Note: This notice does not apply to those news items already copyrighted and received through wire services or other media.)

(c) 2007 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Provided by ProQuest Information and Learning. All rights Reserved.

Story from REDORBIT NEWS: http://www.redorbit.com/news/display/?id=839349

Published: 2007/02/13 15:01:07 CST

© RedOrbit 2005

Study Finds Milwaukee Voucher Students Have Higher Graduation Rates than Public School Students

By School Choice Wisconsin

Last Updated: Sept. 28, 2004

A new study conducted by a leading national authority on high school graduation rates finds that Milwaukee students using vouchers to attend private schools graduate high school at higher rates than students attending the city's public schools. The study, by Manhattan Institute researcher Jay P. Greene, also finds that students using school choice in Milwaukee have higher graduation rates than students in selective Milwaukee public high schools whose students are likely to be more advantaged in their background characteristics.

While early high-quality research on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program suggested that participating students had higher educational outcomes, it has been almost a decade since those early evaluations, and critics have continued to question whether the program provides students with better educational opportunities. The Greene study, sponsored by School Choice Wisconsin, calculates graduation rates for choice students and students remaining in public schools in order to provide new evidence on whether Milwaukee's voucher program benefits students academically.

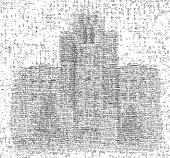
The findings of the study include:

- In the graduating class of 2003, Milwaukee students using vouchers to attend private high schools had a graduation rate of 64%.
- That same year, the 37 Milwaukee public high schools for which data are available had a combined graduation rate of 36%.
- Milwaukee's six academically selective public high schools, whose students are likely to be more advantaged than choice students, had a combined graduation rate of 41% in 2003.
- Using an alternative method to calculate these graduation rates produces similar results, confirming the
 accuracy of the study's results. Both the study's main method and its alternative method are widely accepted
 by education researchers. Greene has pioneered the development of a method for independently estimating
 graduation rates. His method has been used by Education Week's annual Quality Counts report in lieu of less
 reliable official graduation rates. Respected education advocates, from the Gates Foundation to the Education
 Trust, also have relied upon Greene's method as a reliable independent estimate of high school graduation
 rates.

Jay P. Greene, Ph.D., is a Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research where he conducts research and writes about education policy. Dr. Greene obtained his doctorate in political science from Harvard University and was a professor of government at the University of Texas at Austin before joining the Manhattan Institute in 2000. His education research has been cited in U.S. Supreme Court opinions and has appeared in scholarly and popular publications.

Graduation Rates

Choice and Public School Students in Milwaukee



Jay P. Greene, Ph.D.

Senior Fellow

Manhattan Institute for Policy Research

September 28, 2004



The State of Wisconsin last issued an evaluation of the **Milwaukee Parental Choice Program** (MPCP) four years ago. Since then, program opponents have blocked efforts to conduct new research administered by the state.

Next year will bring a renewed attempt to obtain formal state approval for a longitudinal evaluation of the MPCP. This report on graduation rates illustrates the type of information that a long-term, comprehensive study would address.

We chose the Manhattan Institute's Jay P. Greene to conduct a study of high school graduation rates because his pioneering work has made him a leading expert in the field. Indeed, Dr. Greene's method is widely used by and cited in educational publications.

Dr. Greene finds in this report that students in the MPCP graduate at notably higher rates than students in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). This finding, based on data for the 2002-2003 school year, should help spur interest in research that will track results for an extended period of time.

Joan Mitchell

Susan Mitchell School Choice Wisconsin President

SCHOOL CHOICE WISCONSIN

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Paul Petitjean, Board Chair • Waukesha, Wl Susan Mitchell, President • Milwaukee, Wl Margaret Farrow • Milwaukee, Wl Alvaro García-Velez • Milwaukee, Wl Dr. Howard Fuller • Milwaukee, Wl Rev. John McVicker • Milwaukee, Wl William Oberndorf • San Francisco, CA

School Choice Wisconsin is a nonprofit organization that seeks to ensure an honest debate about school choice by providing accurate information on the impact of school choice on families, communities, and schools.

2025 N. Summit Avenue, Suite 103 Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202

Tel. 414 319-9160

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction & Summary2
Previous Research on Milwaukee's School Choice Program2
The Potential & Problems of Examining Graduation Rates4
Estimating Milwaukee's Graduation Rates4
The Results5
A Hard Test to Rule Out Selection Bias5
Verifying the Results6
Conclusion7
End Notes7
TABLES
TABLE 1: Graduation Rates for Choice & Public School Students5
TABLE 2: A Hard Test to Rule Out Selection Bias6
TABLE 3: Verifying the Results7

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines whether students in Milwaukee experience greater educational success if they use a voucher to attend a private school rather than remaining in public schools. While early high-quality research on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program suggested that they do, it has been almost a decade since those early evaluations, and critics have continued to question whether the program provides students with better educational opportunities. This study calculates graduation rates for choice students and students remaining in public schools in order to provide new evidence on whether Milwaukee's voucher program benefits students academically.

Choice students in Milwaukee graduate high school at much higher rates than students in its public schools. What's more, their graduation rates are higher than those at selective public high schools whose students are likely to be more advantaged in their background than Milwaukee's choice students, who are disproportionately poor and minority. This indicates that choice students' higher graduation rates are unlikely to be the result of any demographic bias in the student population. The accuracy of the study's calculations of graduation rates is confirmed by those produced through an alternative method of calculation.

- In the graduating class of 2003, Milwaukee students using vouchers to attend private high schools had a 64% graduation rate.
- That same year, the 37 Milwaukee public high schools for which data are available had a combined graduation rate of 36%.
- Milwaukee's six academically selective public high schools, whose students are likely to be more advantaged than choice students, had a combined graduation rate of 41% in 2003.
- Using an alternative method to calculate these graduation rates
 produces similar results, confirming the accuracy of the study's
 results. Both the study's main method and its alternative method
 are widely accepted by education researchers.

o students in Milwaukee experience greater educational success if they use a voucher to attend a private school rather than remaining in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)? Early high-quality research on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) suggested that they do. But it has been almost a decade since those early evaluations, and the program has grown considerably since then. Critics have continued to question whether the MPCP provides students with better educational opportunities and whether enough information is available to answer that question.

This study addresses, for the first time, a key issue involving the effects of Milwaukee's school choice program on student achievement. In particular, it estimates high school graduation rates for students enrolled in the MPCP and students enrolled in MPS, and compares the two as a measure

of their relative academic achievement. It also presents an estimated graduation rate for a subset of Milwaukee public high schools that have selective admissions policies.

This study finds that students in the MPCP graduate high school at significantly higher rates than all MPS students. Furthermore, choice students also graduate at significantly higher rates than students who attend selective MPS high schools.

Approximately 64% of students who used a voucher to enter 9th grade in 1999 graduated high school in 2003, compared to 36% of all MPS students. Among students at six MPS high schools with selective admission requirements, an estimated 41% graduated in the class of 2003. At other MPS high schools, approximately 34% graduated.

Comparing the graduation rate for Milwaukee's choice students to students at all Milwaukee public high schools as well as to a selective subset of those schools does not provide a definitive evaluation of the city's choice program. However, such a comparison helps confirm earlier research finding that choice students in Milwaukee and other cities have higher academic achievement. A more definitive evaluation would require longitudinal data for individual students and employ a random-assignment research design to control for the selection of students into the choice program. In 2003, the Wisconsin Legislature approved such an evaluation, which was to have been overseen by the state's nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau, but Governor James Doyle vetoed the bill. Another attempt at launching this important study will likely be made in the next legislative session.

In the meantime, the lack of a comprehensive study does not mean that we do not have any useful evidence. The significantly higher graduation rate achieved by choice students compared to all MPS students and even to students who attend selective public schools helps confirm the findings of earlier rigorous evaluations that school choice improves student outcomes.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The MPCP, the country's largest and longest-running voucher effort, has been the subject of two random-assignment studies. Random-assignment designs are the "gold standard" for research because they help ensure that the treatment and control groups are nearly identical. Only chance distinguishes between those who win a lottery and are assigned to the treatment group and those who lose and are assigned to the control group. Because random

assignment has these significant advantages, it is the research design normally employed in medical studies.

The Wisconsin law that created the program requires participating schools to conduct lotteries to admit students whenever they have more applicants than spaces available. This makes random-assignment studies of the program possible. The first State of Wisconsin evaluations, conducted in 1990-1995, did not use random-assignment research designs, but two later evaluations did. The first, conducted by Jay Greene of the University of Texas, and Paul Peterson and Jiangtao Du of Harvard University, found that MPCP students who won lotteries and were able to attend private schools outperformed a control group of students who lost those lotteries and remained in MPS schools. After four years in the program, the treatment group of MPCP students produced standardized test results that were 6 normal curve equivalent points higher than the control group in reading, and 11 points higher than the control group in math.1

Princeton University economist Cecilia Rouse published a second analysis of the Milwaukee school choice program employing a random-assignment design.² Using a slightly different set of test scores than was used by Greene, Peterson, and Du, Rouse found that students able to attend private schools with vouchers outperformed the control group by 8 percentile points on a standardized math test after four years in the program. She found no statistically significant effect from the program in reading.

Our confidence in drawing conclusions from both of these studies is limited by incomplete data, and because they examined the program in its early years before it was expanded to include religious schools. However, the confidence with which we can conclude that Milwaukee's school choice program improves the academic outcomes of its participants is strengthened by a series of random-assignment studies conducted in other cities by a variety of research teams, all of which have produced positive results.

Random-assignment studies of school choice programs in Charlotte, Dayton, New York, and Washington, D.C. have been conducted by researchers at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, Harvard University's Program on Education Policy and Governance, Mathematica Policy Research, Princeton University's economics department, and Harvard University's statistics department.³ Only the Princeton study fails to find statistically significant positive effects for at least some groups of students in some academic subjects. The Princeton study, however, produces positive estimated effects that fall short of statistical significance,

and these estimates only fail to achieve significance because the researchers fail to control for previous test scores (even though relatively few were missing) and define students' race in a way that is inconsistent with federal research grant guidelines.

The bottom line is that existing research already gives us fairly good reason to believe that students are benefiting from participating in the MPCP. Additional research of the kind approved last year by the Wisconsin Legislature would be helpful to verify these earlier findings. Additional research could also clarify ambiguities in the existing research, such as whether some racial/ethnic groups benefit more than others, whether benefits extend to reading as well as math, and whether the effects might be different if more generous vouchers were available.

But the continuation of Milwaukee's school choice program should not be contingent upon receiving approval from new research. Many educational practices and policies currently used without controversy in Milwaukee and elsewhere have considerably less research support than the multiple random-assignment studies supporting Milwaukee's choice program.



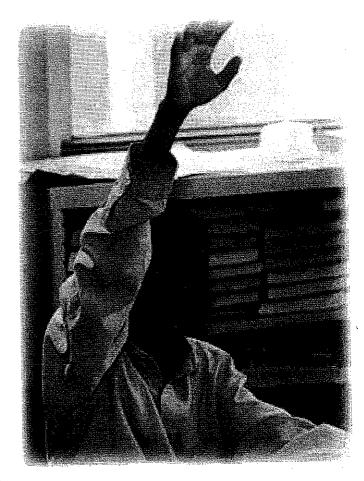
EXAMINING GRADUATION RATES: POTENTIAL AND PROBLEMS

Despite fairly strong evidence in support of the MPCP, critics continue to question its effectiveness and to lament the alleged lack of information on the progress of its students. Interestingly, the principal critics of the program on grounds of inadequate data urged Governor Doyle to veto the longitudinal study that the Legislature approved last year. Strong ongoing support for such a study suggests it might face a more positive outcome in 2005, leading to more direct and up-to-date evidence on how the choice program is faring based on the systematic collection of test scores and a high-quality random assignment evaluation.

But other measures of academic outcomes are available even if test scores are not. In particular, it is possible to examine high school graduation rates as an indicator of academic achievement. High school graduation is a crucial predictor of success or failure later in life. People who graduate high school have significantly higher employment rates, enjoy significantly higher incomes, are significantly less likely to be in prison, and significantly more likely to participate in political and community affairs.

Using graduation rates as an indicator, however, is complicated by the notorious unreliability of official graduation rates. According to the Education Trust, all but six states that provided graduation rates as part of No Child Left Behind requirements reported official graduation rates that were higher than independent estimates indicated they should be. Four states reported graduation rates that were more than 20% higher than independent estimates; Wisconsin reported a 91% graduation rate, compared to an independent estimate of 81%.4 MPS has reported an official high school graduation rate of 61% for the class of 2003.5 An earlier independent estimate put the city's graduation rate at 43%.6 In addition, using graduation rates to measure the relative performance of students in Milwaukee's school choice program is problematic because participating private schools do not report the same graduation statistics as do the public schools.

While official graduation rates are not helpful, techniques for independently estimating graduation rates can be used to provide information on outcomes for voucher students compared to students in MPS. These independent techniques have gained widespread acceptance by education experts and observers. For example, a method developed by Jay Greene has been used by Education Week's annual "Quality Counts" report in lieu of less reliable official



graduation rates. Respected education advocates from the Gates Foundation to the Education Trust have also relied upon the Greene Method as a reliable independent estimate of high school graduation rates.

ESTIMATING MILWAUKEE'S GRADUATION RATES

The Greene Method produces an estimate that is simple to generate but still reliable and reasonably accurate. It compares the number of high school graduates to the number of students who entered 9th grade four years earlier, making adjustments (if possible) for net migration of students and the effects of 9th grade retention on enrollment data. The most recent study using this method estimated the national high school graduation rate to be 70%, the rate for African-American students to be 51%, and the rate for Hispanic students to be 52%. For a more detailed description of the method by which those rates were computed, including the adjustments made for net migration and retention, see http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_03.htm.7

For this study, data were not available to make adjustments for net migration or retention, so a simpler variant of the Greene Method was employed. This study estimates high school graduation rates in Milwaukee by comparing the number of students enrolled in 9th grade in the fall of 1999 to the number of students awarded regular diplomas in the spring of 2003. No adjustments were made for the possible net inflow or outflow of students or for students repeating 9th grade. While this simple approach does not produce a perfectly precise graduation rate, neither would any alternative method. This method does produce a reasonable estimate that is valid for the purposes of comparing choice students and public-school students in Milwaukee.

RESULTS

Information on enrollment and graduates for Milwaukee public schools comes from the MPS "Official State Aids (School Enrollment) Report" and the "Wisconsin School Performance Report." Similar information was obtained for private schools participating in the school choice program from a survey of those schools. Estimated high school graduation rates were calculated by taking the sum of all graduates in 2002-03, the most recent year for which graduation data were available from MPS, and dividing this by the sum of all 9th grade enrollments in 1999-2000. A school was only included if both 9th grade enrollment and graduation data were available for that school.

Data were available for 37 public high schools, charter schools, and "partnership" schools in Milwaukee. The partnership schools are schools that operate under contract with the public-school system and focus on atrisk students. Including charter and partnership schools is essential because they are all part of the public-school system. Excluding them would artificially inflate the graduation rate by excluding schools that the public system creates or employs specifically to educate some of their students who are at greatest risk of failing to graduate. Data were also available for 10 private schools in the choice program, including virtually all participating schools with a substantial number of high school students.

In the 37 Milwaukee public high schools with data available, there were a total of 9,226 students in 9th grade in 1999-2000. Four years later, when that cohort would be graduating, there were 3,329 regular diplomas awarded. Dividing 3,329 by 9,226 we arrive at an estimated high school graduation rate of 36% for the Milwaukee public-school class of 2003 (see Table 1).

In the 10 private high schools participating in Milwaukee's school choice program there were a total of 262 students

using a voucher to attend 9th grade in 1999-2000. In 2002-03 those schools awarded 167 regular diplomas to students attending with vouchers. Dividing 167 by 262 we arrive at an estimated graduation rate of 64% for students in the Milwaukee school choice program (see Table 1).

TABLE 1:		a Dushie
GRADUATION RATES FOR	CHOICE 64%	84 PUBLIC 36%
Graduation Rate		
9th Graders in '99-2000	262	9,226
Graduates in 2002-03	167	3,329
Number of Schools	10	37

A HARD TEST TO RULE OUT SELECTION BIAS

While choice students graduate high school at a substantially higher rate than do public-school students in Milwaukee, perhaps this can be explained in part or in full by differences in the advantages and disadvantages that choice and public-school students bring to their education. That is, the comparison could be distorted by selection bias. It might be reasonable to expect that students who voluntarily participate in a school choice program are more highly motivated and have parents who are particularly involved and concerned with their education. On the other hand, students and their families might seek a voucher to switch to an alternative school because they are not progressing well educationally, which would produce a bias in the opposite direction.

Earlier research on the MPCP suggests that choice students are significantly more likely to be low-income and minority, and to have lower initial test scores than the average student in MPS.9 Nevertheless, researchers must be concerned that unobserved differences between students seeking vouchers and those who remain in public schools could account for differences in outcomes. The best way to rule out that possibility is to employ a random-assignment research design. Since such a design is not available for this study of graduation rates, it would be reasonable to subject the voucher program to a hard test in order to increase confidence that unobserved factors cannot account for the superior graduation rate among choice students. By comparing the outcomes of choice students to a subset of MPS students who are likely to be at least as advantaged in their background characteristics, if not significantly more so, we can evaluate whether background characteristics might account for the choice program's higher graduation rate. There is a subset of Milwaukee public high schools that are selective in their admissions because only students meeting certain academic requirements are eligible to enroll. The choice program, on the other hand, is not allowed to establish academic requirements for admission and must accept all students, or accept students by lottery if it is over-enrolled. The students in selective Milwaukee public high schools are thus likely to be at least as advantaged as the students in the choice program. By comparing the graduation rate of students in selective MPS high schools to that of students in the choice program, we are putting the MPCP to a hard test. If it outperforms the selective public schools, its success is unlikely to be caused by background factors.

There were six public high schools with academic admission requirements in Milwaukee that also had the necessary data available to estimate graduation rates. At those six schools there were 2,968 students enrolled in 9th grade in 1999-2000. In 2002-03 those schools graduated 1,220 students, producing an estimated graduation rate of 41% (see Table 2). The rate at these selective public high schools is in fact higher than in non-selective Milwaukee public high schools, where an estimated 34% of the class of 2003 graduated. The 41% figure for selective Milwaukee public high schools is still much less than the 64% graduation rate estimated for students in the school choice program. Thus, the choice program easily passes this hard test; it is very unlikely that differences in the backgrounds of its students account for their superior performance.

Table 2:			
A HARD TEST TO RUI		Non-se	lective
•	Choice Students		ents
Graduation Rate	64%	41% 34	%
9th Graders, '99-2000	262	2,968 6,2	258
Graduates in 2002-03	167	1,220 2,1	09
Number of Schools	10	6	31
		Selective Public School Students	
		Judents	

VERIFYING THE RESULTS

The gap in the graduation rate between choice students and students in selective MPS high schools is approximately 23 percentage points. Could the margin of error in estimating graduation rates account for this gap? Given that the

method used to compute graduation rates in this study is a very simple one, dividing the number of graduates by the number of 9th graders four years earlier without any adjustments, it is reasonable to consider the possible distortion of estimation error.

It is hard to imagine how error could fully account for a 23-point gap in graduation rates. We know that comparing the number of 9th graders to the number of graduates four years later does not produce a perfectly precise graduation rate, but it is unlikely such an approach would be off by a very large margin. All of the students who enter 9th grade eventually have to either graduate or drop out. When we see 9,226 Milwaukee public-school students start high school while only 3,329 earn their diplomas, we know that the graduation rate is well below 50% even if we cannot say that it is precisely 36%. Similarly, if we see 262 choice students enter high school and 167 graduate four years later, we can be confident that the graduation rate is well above 50% even if we cannot say that it is precisely 64%.

However, even if the gap cannot be entirely due to estimation error, it is reasonable to consider how large our estimation error might be. The primary source of uncertainty in these estimates is the migration of some students into and out of these school systems between 9th grade and graduation. While this movement of students is a concern, it is unlikely to substantially distort the comparisons in this study. For example, a previous study estimated the graduation rate for the state of Wisconsin to be 81%. Removing the adjustments made in that study for student migration would have changed that estimate to 78%. The adjustment makes a difference, but not a very large one.

Another way to check the precision of the method used to estimate graduation rates in this study is to employ another method to see how results differ. The Harvard Civil Rights Project and the Urban Institute have developed an approach that they call the Cumulative Promotion Index.¹² It compares the number of 10th graders in one year to the number of 9th graders the year before, then the number of 11th graders to the number of 12th graders to the number of 11th graders the year before, and finally the number of graduates to the number of students who started 12th grade that same year. The idea is to compute the percentage of students promoted from one grade to the next in one year's time as a way of estimating the graduation rate.

The Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) has been widely accepted and reported. It also has the virtue, for our purposes,

of relying only on enrollment data from two consecutive school years. Because it creates a "synthetic cohort" across one year of time rather than tracking an actual cohort of students over four years, CPI is less vulnerable than the unadjusted method used in this study to errors caused by students moving into or out of school systems. The CPI estimate of the graduation rate for Milwaukee public high schools is 39%, very close to our estimate of 36% (see Table 3). The CPI estimate for choice students is 67%, also very similar to our estimate of 64%. And the CPI estimate for selective Milwaukee public high schools is 49%, which is higher than our estimate of 41%. With the CPI approach the gap between the graduation rates for choice students and students attending selective Milwaukee public high schools is a fairly large 18 percentage points.

- a		\$1850.00P			١
TABLE 3:				e allenie	-
VERIFYING T	JE DECI	IITS			-1
VERIFTING II	L	2000		APROPAL PROPAGATION OF THE PROPA	ŀ
		SUBDIES S	Selective	ALCONOMIC CONTRACTOR	- 1
	Choice		Jelective Jelective		- 1
		Hola Hale P	ublic Scho	OI:	- 1
	Students		Students		
				Graphic 2000	
Greene Metho	d 64%	36%	41%	34%	1
GICCITC MICCIO		WIOLEGIN.			
CPI Method	67%	39%	49%	34%	
CHIMCthou		300 CO			
		Public Sch	ool N	on-selective	1
	***************************************	Student	- Talle b	ublic School	
		Student		upile Jenoo	
		2402624		Students	
	adding France	2007/03/2012	2012/2012/2012	COX 66 X 5156 F	_

CONCLUSION

The evidence clearly shows that students who receive a voucher to attend a private school in Milwaukee graduate high school at much higher rates than MPS students. Students in the choice program also graduate at a much higher rate than do students at selective MPS high schools, suggesting that differences in student background are unlikely to account for the superior achievement of voucher students. These findings hold true whether one uses an unadjusted variant of the Greene Method or the Cumulative Promotion Index to estimate graduation rates, suggesting that estimation error is unlikely to account for the superior achievement of voucher students.

These graduation-rate results are consistent with earlier random-assignment research in Milwaukee and other cities showing that students experience significant academic benefits from being able to attend a private school with a voucher. Confirming earlier research may not silence critics of Milwaukee's school choice program, but it ought to reassure other observers of the program that it does produce substantial benefits.

END NOTES

- ¹ Jay P. Greene, Paul E. Peterson, and Jiangtao Du, "Effectiveness of School Choice: The Milwaukee Experiment," *Education and Urban Society*, February 1999.
- ² Cecilia Elena Rouse, "Private School Vouchers and Student Achievement," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, May, 1998.
- ³ See Jay P. Greene, "Vouchers in Charlotte," Education Next, Summer 2001; William G. Howell and Paul E. Peterson, The Education Gap (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution) 2002; Alan B. Krueger and Pei Zhu, "Another Look at the New York City School Voucher Experiment," Working Paper, March 2003; and John Barnard, et al, "Principal Stratification Approach to Broken Randomized Experiments: A Case Study of School Choice Vouchers in New York City," Journal of the American Statistical Association, June 2003.
- ⁴ "Telling the Whole Truth (or Not) About High School Graduation," Education Trust Working Paper, December 2003, Table 1.
- 5 "2002–3 District Report Card for the Milwaukee Public Schools," p. 19.



- 6 Jay P. Greene, "High School Graduation Rates in the United States," Manhattan Institute Civic Report, November 2001.
- 7 Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster, "Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States," Manhattan Institute for Policy Research Education Working Paper Number 3, September 2003.

- ⁸ The MPS Office of Student Services calculates the district's Official State Aids Report every year during the district's official third Friday in September enrollment count. Published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction in May for the prior school year, the Wisconsin School Performance Report serves as the state's annual public school report card. See http://www2.dpi.state.wi.us/spr/.
- ⁹ See John F. Witte, *The Market Approach to Education: An Analysis of America's First Voucher Program* Princeton University Press, 2000; and Jay P. Greene, Paul E. Peterson, and Jiangtao Du, "Effectiveness of School Choice: The Milwaukee Experiment," Education and Urban Society, February 1999.
- 10 Howard Fuller and George A. Mitchell, "Selective Admission Practices? Comparing the Milwaukee Public Schools and the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program," Institute for the Transformation of Learning, Marquette University, January 2000.
- 11 According to the Fuller and Mitchell report they are Custer, Rufus King, Madison University, Milwaukee High School of the Arts, Milwaukee Trade and Technical High School, and Riverside. The Milwaukee Trade and Technical High School was renamed Bradley Tech.
- 12 See Gary Orfield, Daniel Losen, Johanna Wald, and Christopher B. Swanson, "Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis," A Joint Release By: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, The Urban Institute, Advocates for Children of New York, The Civil Society Institute, 2004.





gvertisement.



Big-city schools struggle with graduation rates

Updated 6/20/2006 11:26 PM ET
By Greg Toppo, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Students in a handful of big-city school districts have a less than 50-50 chance of graduating from high school with their peers, and a few cities graduate far fewer than half each spring, according to research released on Tuesday.

Fourteen urban school districts have on-time graduation rates lower than 50%; they include Detroit, Baltimore, New York, Milwaukee, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Miami, Dallas, Denver and Houston.

TABLE: Graduation rates for 50 largest districts in U.S.

The findings present a bleak picture and are sure to generate controversy as lawmakers and others push to keep U.S. students competitive globally.

While the basic finding that the nation's overall graduation rate is about 70% is not new, the study suggests that graduation rates are much lower than previously reported in many states. It also could bring the dropout debate to the local level, because it allows anyone with Internet access to view with unprecedented detail data on the nation's 12,000 school districts.

Among the nation's 50 largest districts, the study finds, three graduate fewer than 40%: Detroit (21.7%), Baltimore (38.5%) and New York City (38.9%).

The advantage of the new study is that "you could apply it to any and all school districts in the country with the same validity — and the same problems," says Michael Casserly of The Council of the Great City Schools, an advocacy group for large urban districts.

He says it's still unclear whether researcher Christopher Swanson overstates the problem. Swanson's analysis, strictly speaking, is not a calculation of dropout rates but of graduation rates; it estimates the probability that a student in ninth grade will complete high school on time and with a regular diploma.

Adding to the debate: The study is sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which promotes its own brand of high school reform. Last year, Bill Gates called U.S. high schools "obsolete."

The study, which uses 2002 and 2003 data, the most current available, finds that public schools graduate 69.6% of an estimated 4 million eligible students each spring, meaning about 1.2 million students likely won't graduate this

year. That means about 7,000 students drop out per school day, Swanson says.

Researcher Lawrence Mishel of the Economic Policy Institute says Swanson's figures "seriously understate graduation rates, especially for minorities." They say that just 52% of blacks graduate, and 57% of Hispanics.

Mishel says by comparing the number of graduates with the number of ninth-graders, Swanson exaggerates the effects of the "ninth-grade bulge," in which many ninth-graders are held back a year before tackling more advanced work and, often, state-mandated exit exams. Mishel's most recent research puts the overall U.S. graduation rate at 82%.

Lowest to highest graduation rates in the nation's 50 largest school districts

Rate	District	Size rank	Rate	District	Size rank	Rate	District	Size rank
21.7	Detroit	11	53.7	New Orleans	48	68.4	Gwinnett County, Ga.	20
38.5	Baltimore City, Md.	30	53.8	Duval County, Fla.	19	68.6	Brevard County, Fla.	42
	New York City	1	54.6	Clark County, Nev.	6	69.3	Fulton County, Ga.	45
43,1	Milwaukee	28	54.8	DeKalb County, Ga.	27	70.0	Hillsborough County, Fla.	10 .
43.8	Cleveland	44	55.1	Austin	37	70.2	Anne Arundel County, Md.	40
. my madden bush t	Los Angeles	2	55.2	Palm Beach County, Fla.	12	70.4	Cobb County, Ga.	26
more madelle as	Miami-Dade County, Fla.	4	55.5	Philadelphia	8	72.2	Granite, Utah	46
	Dallas	13	56.0	Charlotte	23	75.3	Mesa, Ariz.	39
46.5	Pinellas County, Fla.	22	56.2	Orange County, Fla.	15	75.8	Northside, Tex.	49
	Denver	43	60.1	Polk County, Fla.	34	77.0	Jefferson County, Colo.	33
48.5	Memphis	21	62.2	Jefferson County, Ky.	31	80.2	Jordan, Utah	41
48.7	Broward County, Fla.	5	63.0	San Diego	16	81.3	Cypress-Fairbanks, Tex.	47
	Fort Worth	36	63.1	Fresno	35	81.5	Montgomery County, Md.	17
48.9	Houston .	7	63.7	Hawaii (statewide)	9	81.9	Baltimore County, Md.	24
50.4	Nashville	50	66.5	Virginia Beach	38	82.2	Wake County, N.C.	25
52.0	Albuquerque	32	67.3	Prince George's County, Md.	. 18	82.5	Fairfax County, Va.	14
range and A	Chicago	3	68.1	Long Beach	29	ec. Associate	er en verk en er Seine med er oppoppige er oppoppie en betrette verk er en er en er en en en en en en en en en	

Source: EPE Research Center

Find this article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2006-06-20-dropout-rates_x.htm

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright 2007 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.



www.jsonline.com | Return to regular view

Original Story URL: http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=416956

Milwaukee near bottom for graduation rates

But methods questioned in study that reaches finding

By SARAH CARR scarr@journalsentinel.com

Posted: April 19, 2006

Milwaukee public high schools have one of the worst graduation rates in the country among large school districts, according to a new report that takes the unusual step of trying to make comparisons across large school districts as well as states.

Ninety-four of the 100 largest school districts in the country have higher graduation rates than Milwaukee, where the graduation rate is 45%, according to a study by the Manhattan Institute, a think tank in New York.

That compares with 58% in Philadelphia, 63% in New Orleans and 50% in Chicago for the class of 2003, the most recent year for which data was available.

The annual study broke down results by district for the first time in four years. Most previous versions of the study have made only state-by-state comparisons. Some of the largest districts - like Charlotte-Mecklenburg in North Carolina - are countywide districts, however, making apples-to-apples comparisons still tricky.

The Manhattan Institute studies have repeatedly found that while Wisconsin has one of the highest graduation rates overall, it also has one of the worst graduation rates for African-American students. This year, Wisconsin came in third, with an overall graduation rate of 85%. For African-Americans, the statewide graduation rate was 55% - the second-lowest in the country. MPS was about 60% black in 2003, according to the state Department of Public Instruction.

Critics have long said that the Manhattan Institute's methodology underestimates the graduation rate nationally, particularly in urban areas and among minority students. State and district estimates put the 2003 graduation rate in Milwaukee at 61% and 67%, respectively.

In the past, the institute has consistently published studies with findings that support school vouchers.

But "the bottom line is that graduation rates are very low in Milwaukee," said Jay Greene, a senior

fellow at the institute. "Even when we only reported statewide numbers, we could see from the racial breakouts how Milwaukee was probably driving the results."

Greene will be a leader in an upcoming study of the voucher program in Milwaukee, which will compare test scores over time from a group of students attending voucher schools with those at charter schools and traditional public schools.

Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent William Andrekopoulos said he views the report "as being a mathematical exercise, but it doesn't really tell us the story of what happens to children from ninth through 12th grade."

However, he added that "all of these reports are good to some degree because it challenges us to do a much better job." He cited the move to smaller high schools in Milwaukee, which greatly expanded in 2003, as a key part of the effort to improve the city's graduation rate.

Another perspective

Even before the study was released this morning, a dispute had emerged between Greene and the Economic Policy Institute, a think tank in Washington, D.C., with several teachers union officials on its board.

Lawrence Mishel, president of the Economic Policy Institute, said a report he plans to release today on graduation rates will be "far different than Jay Greene banging out the same numbers he's banged out before using a flawed methodology."

Mishel and Greene have arrived at vastly different national estimates of graduation rates. For instance, while Greene puts the nationwide graduation rate for African-Americans at about 55%, Mishel says it's closer to 75%.

Broadly speaking, Greene divides the number of students receiving diplomas by the number of students who started high school.

Mishel criticizes Greene for not following individual students or groups of students over time but instead relying on broader population and school district data that he says is murky and tough to compare across states. Greene responds that Mishel's work focuses on a "sample" of the population and can therefore miss some of the harder-to-find young people - like dropouts - and provide a rose-colored view of reality.

The debate comes at a time when the nation is focused on high schools and dropouts. Oprah Winfrey devoted two episodes of her show to the subject a week ago, and several political and advocacy groups have argued in recent months over how to compare test scores and graduation rates across states.

Jean Whitcomb, the education data consultant for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, said the state calculated its figure of 61% in 2003 by looking at the number of students who received diplomas divided by that same number plus the number of dropouts.

New tracking system

That formula "has its limitations," she said, adding that the current system of tracking student transfers and dropouts by assigning each student a personal identification number is much more reliable. The

department began phasing in that system in 2004.

"If people really want to know if kids are graduating and at what rates, this is the way to find that out," she said.

She criticized graduation rate estimates that rely too much on ninth-grade enrollment, noting that more students are held back in the ninth grade than any other year, resulting in a skewed analysis. Greene says he takes this into account and fact-checks his estimates of ninth-grade enrollment against census figures showing the number of 14-year-olds. He said the number of ninth-graders put into his formula is adjusted for "population changes."

However, Andrekopoulos and Deb Lindsey, the director of research and assessment for MPS, say the report does not account enough for the high mobility rates in urban areas, particularly those with school voucher programs, where students might leave a public high school after ninth grade for a voucher school or a suburban school district.

"Milwaukee and a couple of other districts nationally that have very large voucher programs are probably disadvantaged by these kinds of calculations because of the non-inclusion of private school students being paid for by public school funds," Lindsey says.

Through the voucher program, low-income students can attend private schools with state-funded tuition vouchers.

The Manhattan Institute does not count GED degrees as diplomas. The Economic Policy Institute puts them in a separate category, so they are not part of the overall graduation rate.

The report released this morning also found that girls graduate at a significantly higher rate than boys across the country. In Milwaukee, the report puts the graduation rate for girls at 53%, compared with 39% for boys.

Buy a link here

From the April 19, 2006 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Have an opinion on this story? Write a letter to the editor or start an online forum.

Subscribe today and receive 4 weeks free! Sign up now.

© 2006, Journal Sentinel Inc. All rights reserved. | Produced by Journal Interactive | Privacy Policy
Journal Sentinel Inc. is a subsidiary of Journal Communications.

MPCP 2007-2008 Enrollment by Grade Level*

	3rd Friday in Septembe		
Grade Level	Headcount	FTE	
4 Year-Old Kindergarten	1,576	894.5	
5 Year-Old Kindergarten	1,856	1854.5	
1st Grade	1,815	1,815	
2nd Grade	1,713	1,713	
3rd Grade	1,586	1,586	
4th Grade	1,508	1,508	
5th Grade	1,452	1,452	
6th Grade	1,511	1,511	
7th Grade	1,414	1,414	
8th Grade	1,369	1,369	
9th Grade	1,125	1,125	
10th Grade	1,007	1,007	
11th Grade	726	726	
12th Grade	575	575	
Totals	19,233	18,550	

^{*}These are unaudited numbers and are subject to change.

Taken from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Website: http://dpi.state.wi.us/sms/doc/mpc07fnf.doc



January

DATE: DECEMBER 8, 2008

TO: ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION REFORM

FROM: STEVE BAAS, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS DIRECTOR

METROPOLITAN MILWAUKEE ASSOCIATION OF COMMERCE

RE: ASSEMBLY BILL 637

On behalf of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC), I am pleased to urge your support for Assembly Bill 637, allowing participation in the Milwaukee Parental School Choice Program for private high schools in Milwaukee County.

The MMAC represents over 2000 member businesses employing more than 300,000 workers in the metropolitan Milwaukee area. In addition, the MMAC is a founding member of the Milwaukee 7, Southeast Wisconsin's seven-county regional economic development organization. As such, we are acutely aware of how important a strong network of quality education options is for our region, its residents, and its economy. In fact, in a 2007 year-end survey, our Board of Directors was asked what the biggest challenge facing their business was in the upcoming year. While Wisconsin's High Tax Burden ranked number one, Education, and Workforce ranked a close second and third respectively. Taken together, the ability of our educational system to produce individuals ready to be productive members of the workforce was the most serious concern of our Board.

The mathematics of the 21st Century Wisconsin workforce is daunting. Within this decade, two workers will be retiring from our workforce for every one adult entering it. Just last month, one of our larger members told us that, due to a combination of business expansion and workforce retirement, he would need to hire 50 new employees a week just to keep pace. A recent survey of our members found that in 2008, the metro Milwaukee region will need to add an additional 26,000 workers to accommodate projected business growth. Meanwhile, in the Milwaukee 7 region, there are 196,000 individuals over the age of 25 without a high school degree.

Simply put, even our best efforts to recruit talent from around the country and around the world is not going to be able to keep pace with the needs of our economy if we do not do a better job of "growing our own." Our regional economy faces an "all hands on deck" emergency with regard to the development of high school graduates prepared to enter the workforce. AB 637 recognizes and responds to that emergency.

-	
1	
}	

While some may choose to cast the legislation before you in polarizing terms of an expansion of school choice versus the government school system, or public versus private schools, we do not have that luxury at the MMAC. We see this legislation in much more practical terms: If the Milwaukee area is going to produce enough workforce-ready graduates to fuel a growing economy, we need to engage the maximum number of quality education options to meet that challenge. This bill increases the number of educational partners we have in this effort.

To the employer in need of a worker, it doesn't matter whether that individual is the product of an MPS school, a Charter school, a Milwaukee Parental Choice school, a public school, a private school, or a parochial school. AB 637 expands educational opportunity for low income students in the City of Milwaukee by giving them access to private high schools within Milwaukee County. By giving these students more options to get a quality education at the school of their choice we increase the possibility that they will graduate with the skills needed to pursue their dreams, to become productive members of a skilled workforce, and to fuel a growing economy moving a great state forward.

It is my hope that you will join us in supporting this important legislation.

###

Public Hearing on Assembly Bill 637 January 8, 2008

Testimony of Dennis Oulahan, President Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association

My name is Dennis Oulahan, and I'm the president of the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association. I represent over 8,000 educators who work in MPS schools.

I am here to testify against Assembly Bill 637, which expands the voucher program to private high schools throughout Milwaukee County.

The voucher program has been detrimental to the majority of children in Milwaukee who attend MPS schools. It has created a drain on MPS' budget, and has led to cuts in important programs and services that our students depend on. Important services provided by our educational assistants, guidance counselors, social workers, nurses, and other specialists have diminished in the years since the voucher program began. Class sizes of 40 students are no longer uncommon, even in Kindergarten and in our highest performing schools, such as Rufus King and Riverside High Schools. Special education caseloads are in some cases unmanageable. Students should not have to share desks, textbooks, computers or other materials, yet MPS students are forced to do that every day.

Despite the more than \$636 million that has been spent on the voucher program from 1990 through June 2007, little accountability is demanded of the participating schools. Participating private schools do not meet the same standards as public schools, are not subject to the same testing requirements as public schools and are not required to employ certified teachers, much less individuals who have college degrees.

In addition, a study published by the Economic Policy Institute in October 2007 demonstrates that competition from the voucher program in Milwaukee has not resulted in academic achievement gains in MPS schools. The only competition is for limited resources.

The program should not be expanded until stricter accountability standards are in place, and until we know – using apples to apples comparisons – that voucher schools are educating our children in the ways we have come to expect from our public school educators.

As a taxpayer and citizen, I can readily see how each and every school in MPS is doing educating their students; I can read their education plans; I can review standardized test scores, and I can make informed choices based on the information that must be provided to me by law.

That is not the case with the voucher program. It seems that even though my tax dollars are funding education in private schools, I have no right to any information about that education. That double-standard must be addressed before any expansion is considered. In addition to the problem of inadequate accountability measures for schools participating in the voucher program, this bill has serious financial implications for Milwaukee taxpayers. We are already supporting two school systems, and this bill would require that we also support schools outside of the city. Exacerbating the problem is the highly punitive manner in which vouchers are funded, requiring city taxpayers to pay 45% of the cost of every voucher granted.

I urge you to vote no on Assembly Bill 637. Instead, we need our legislature to focus on how to better support the majority of children in Milwaukee who attend public schools. A great start would be to implement comprehensive school funding reform.

We are making progress in MPS, but our school board recently approved a goal that calls for holding the increase in overall spending to under 1% next school year. That means we will have many more staff and program cuts, making it much more challenging for the educators who are left to continue to provide for our students.

We need your support for real reforms that are proven effective with Milwaukee's children. Expanding the voucher program will only hurt the students who most need our help.

Again, vote no on Assembly Bill 637. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: State Representative Don Pridemore, Chair

Members, Assembly Committee on Education Reform

FROM: Kim Wadas, Associate Director July West

DATE: January 8, 2008

RE: Assembly Bill 637, Milwaukee Parental Choice Program Expansion

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) strongly supports Assembly Bill 637, which would allow more families, and their high school aged students, to utilize the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP).

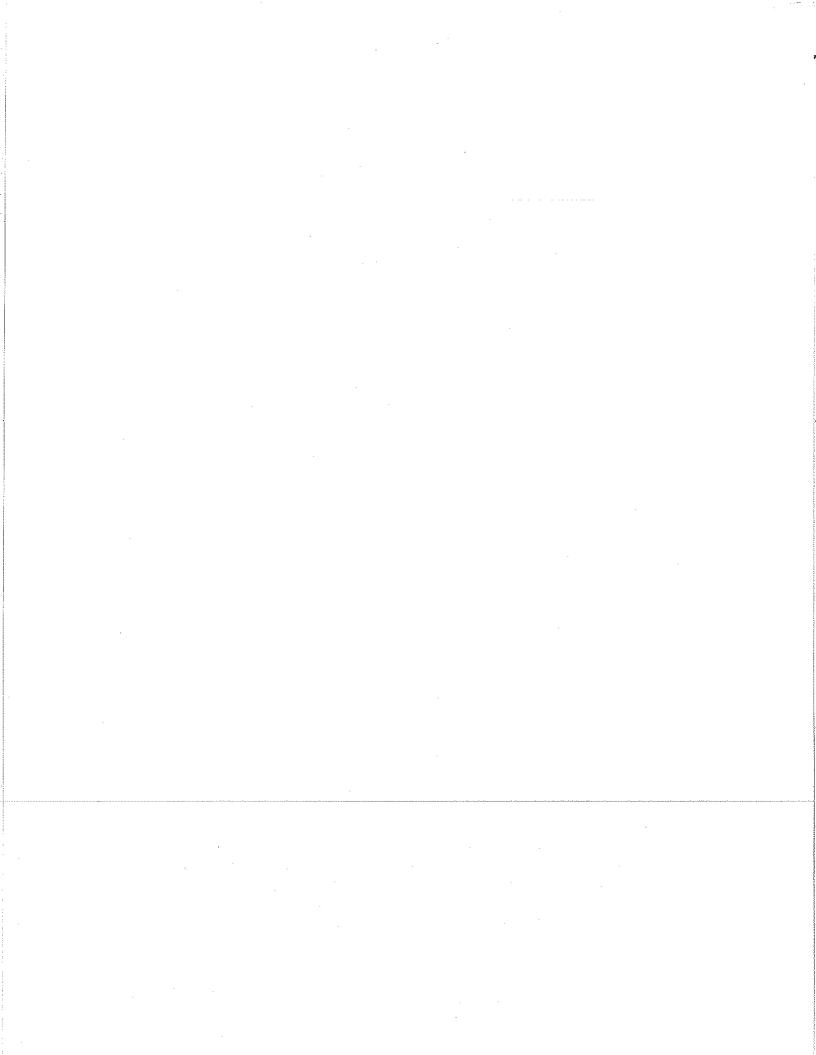
Our support for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program is grounded in a long-standing principle that parents are the primary educators of their children. Parents educate their children daily, teaching and sharing with them the life skills needed to live as responsible members of society. As Catholics, we believe public policies should affirm the vital role of parents in their children's education by giving them meaningful choices in where and how their children are educated.

Our Catholic tradition also includes a call to exercise a "preferential option for the poor." This principle is advanced when those of limited means are empowered with the ability to exercise their rights in the same manner available to other citizens who enjoy more material resources. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, targeted to low-income families, is an example of such an option. The program gives parents the ability to exercise their basic rights and guide their children's education without discrimination.

By giving eligible students important new options, AB 637 ensures that all parents and guardians within the City of Milwaukee are given the opportunity to fulfill their role as primary educator. AB 637 would allow eligible students in the City of Milwaukee to attend any religious or independent school serving grades 9-12 in Milwaukee County. Hundreds of low-income high school students living in the City of Milwaukee remain outside the Choice Program because the only religious or independent school that could realistically serve them is located in a nearby suburb.

Facilitating the ability of these schools to accept voucher students provides yet another way to bridge the divides of geography, economics, and race, and foster diversity in the greater Milwaukee area.

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on this proposal and urges you to support Assembly Bill 637.





Tom Barrett Mayor, City of Milwaukee

January 7, 2008

Milwaukee Delegation Members

Dear Milwaukee Delegation Member:

Assembly Bill 637 proposes changes to the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) program by expanding the current borders of the City of Milwaukee to include all schools within Milwaukee County. I ask you to vote against this proposal until an equitable solution is passed to fully fund the current MPCP program.

As you know, the current MPCP funding formula is an inequitable property tax burden on City of Milwaukee property taxpayers because the state only reimburses 55% of the cost of a Choice student versus almost 75% of a Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) student. Furthermore, students enrolled in the MPCP program are not counted for the purposes of general categorical school aids.

The City fought hard to address these issues in the last state budget. The problem drew different proposals from the Governor and Legislature. In the end, a "High Poverty District Aid" appropriation was made in lieu of fully funding the cost of the MPCP program. While this new aid program takes us in a forward direction, it is not nearly enough to address the true fiscal impact to city taxpayers.

Passing AB 637 has the potential to accelerate the number of participants and reaching the current cap sooner than currently predicted. Every additional Choice student enrolled digs a deeper financial deficit for state aids to cover the actual cost and make an equitable formula that does not punish MPS or the city taxpayer.

Assembly Bill 637 should be set aside for now, and work should begin immediately to correct the school choice funding flaw before any expansion of the program is considered.

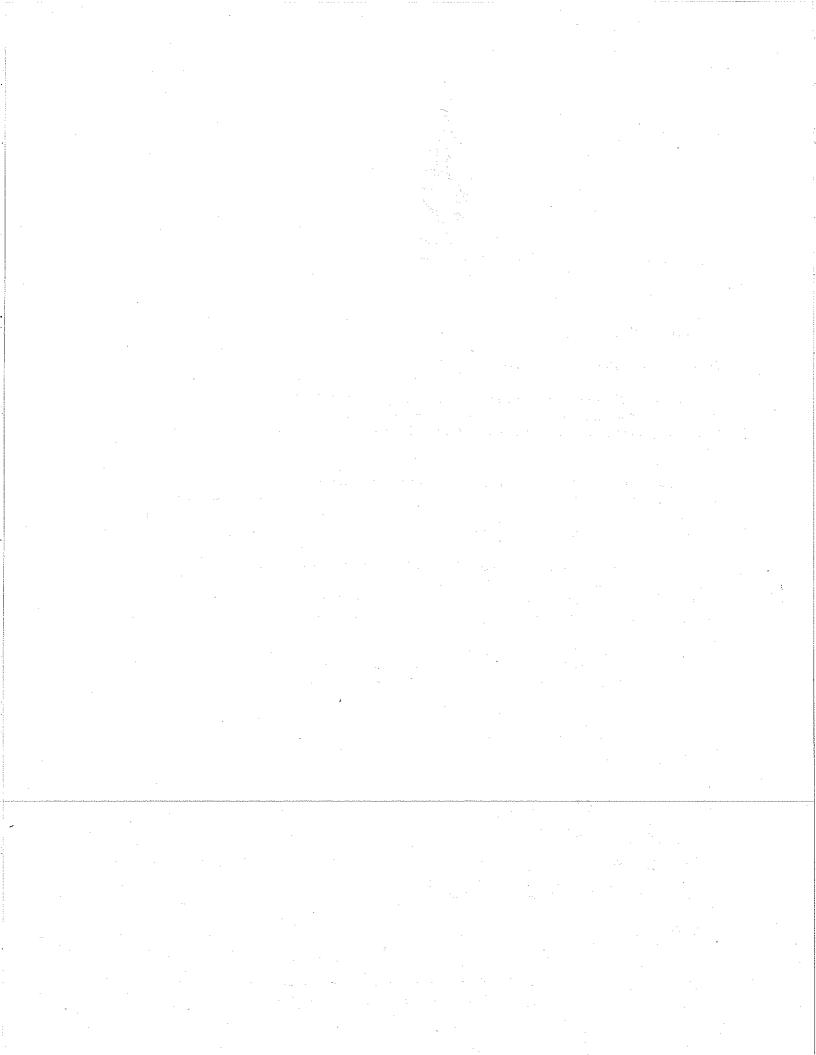
Sincerely,

Mayor Tom Barrett

c: Members, Committee on Education Reform

Dan Barrell

TB:pv:mo





WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE ANNETTE POLLY WILLIAMS

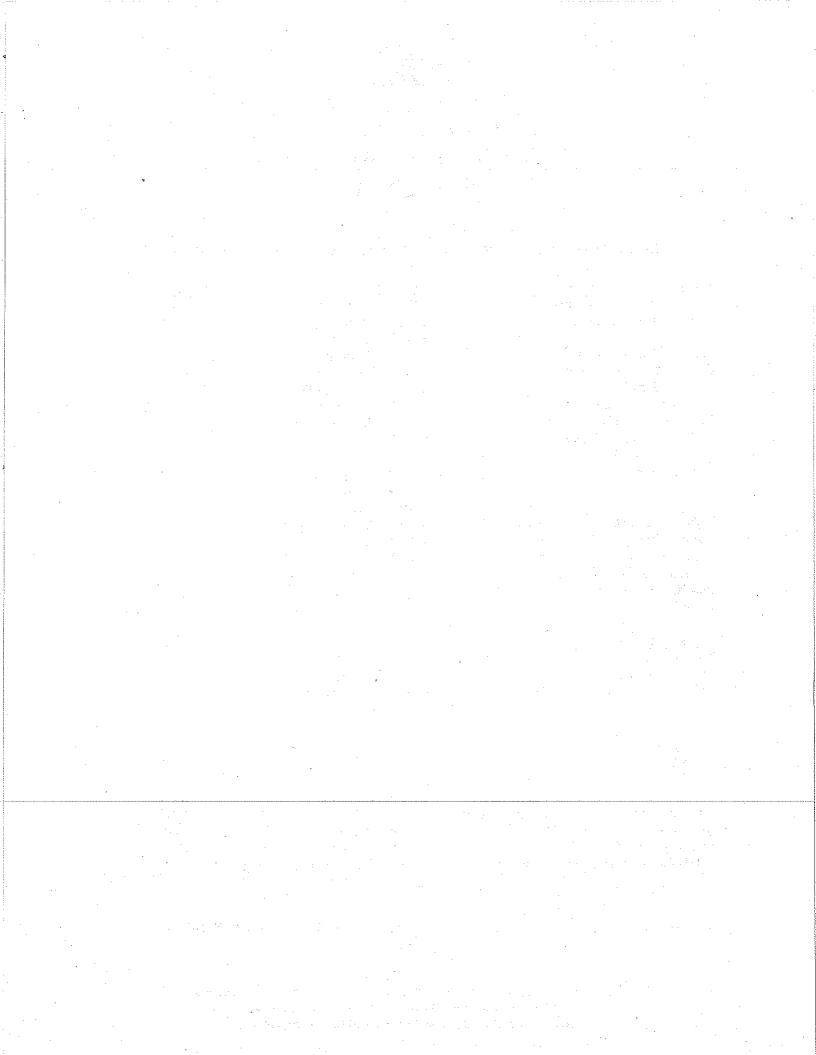
STATE REPRESENTATIVE 10TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program - High School Programs 2007-2008

School:	Address:	Grades:
Atlas Preparatory Academy	2911 S. 32 nd Street	K4-12
Believers in Christ Christian Academy	4065 N. 25 th Street	K4-12 K4-12
2 - 1-10 III Clinical Chilibrian Floridoniy	3940 N. 21 st Street	12-7-12
Ceria M. Travis Academy	2733 W. Wisconsin	K4-12
Clara Mohammad School	317 W. Wright Street	K4-12
CEO Leadership Academy	2433 W. Roosevelt Dr	9-12
Destiny High School	7210 N. 76 th Street	9-12
Divine Savior Holy Angels High School	4257 N. 100 th Street	9-12
Dr. Brenda Noach Choice School	5575 N. 76 th Street	K4-12
Early View Academy	7132 W. Good Hope Rd	K4-12
Excel Academy	3624 W. North Ave	K4-12
•	3500 W. Center St.	
	2479 N. Sherman Ave.	
Holy Redeemer Christian Academy	3500 W. Mother Daniels Way	K4-12
Institute for Career Empowerment	700 W. Michigan Ave.	8-12
Marquette University High School	3401 W. Wisconsin Ave.	9-12
Messmer Catholic Schools	742 W. Capitol Dr.	K4-12
Pius XI High School	135 N. 76 th Street	9-12
Right Step	2801 W. Wisconsin Ave,	5-12
Saint Joan Antida High School	1341 N. Cass Street	9-12
Texas Bufkin Academy	827 N. 34 th Street	K4-12
The Hope School	3215 N. Martin Luther King Dr	9-12
Travis Technology High School	8350 N. Steven Rd.	9-12
Wisconsin Lutheran High School	330 N. Glenview Ave	9-12
	e e	
Partial High School Programs:		
Eastbrook Academy	5375 N. Green Bay Ave	K4-10
Excel Learning Academy	8634 W. Brown Deer Rd	K4-10
* Garden Homes Community Montessori	2475 W. Roosevelt	K4-9
Milwaukee Seventh Day Adventist School	10900 W. Mill Rd	K5-11
Noah's Ark Preparatory	334 W. Brown St	K4-9
Salam School	4707 S. 13 th Street	K4-9
* SMI Early College Preparatory High	1818 North Martin Luther King	9

As of 9/24/07

^{*} Indicates New to the program in 2007-2008





WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY Christine Sinicki STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Testimony on 2007 Assembly Bill 637 Committee on Education Reform January 8th, 2008

Dear Chairman Pridemore and Honorable Members:

It will come as no surprise to the members of this committee that I oppose AB 637. I have always opposed any attempts to expand the scope of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) beyond the borderlines set by state law. Those lines are the city limits of the City of Milwaukee.

Our State Supreme court upheld the statutory geographic limits of the voucher school. As the Court stated, this program has been since its beginnings a City of Milwaukee program and should remain so.

Today I stand by my past opposition to any geographic expansion of the program. I do so despite the fact that I have the private high school in my Assembly district that would most benefit to be in to the voucher school program: Sir Thomas More High School, in the suburb of Saint Francis. Sir Thomas More's bid to become a voucher school, and voucher advocate's desire for it to join the program was there reason the Supreme Court affirmed the geographic limits set by state law.

I do not support expanding the voucher school program geographically or numerically. MPCP advocates should work on improving the quality of the program they are lucky to have already, instead of constantly agitating to expand it. There are many problems with the voucher program that need to be fixed in spite of improvements in accountability put in to place in the last two legislative sessions.

Finally, I find it highly ironic that despite their indignant opposition to busing public school children because it takes them out of their neighborhood schools, the antipublic education lobby fully supports transporting students out of their neighborhoods and the City when it means filling seats in private, suburban schools.

I urge you to stand with the statutory rules of the voucher school program and oppose AB 637. Voucher students and their schools should remain in the City of Milwaukee, as the authors of this program intended.

Thank you for your time and attention to my concerns.